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1838

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church,

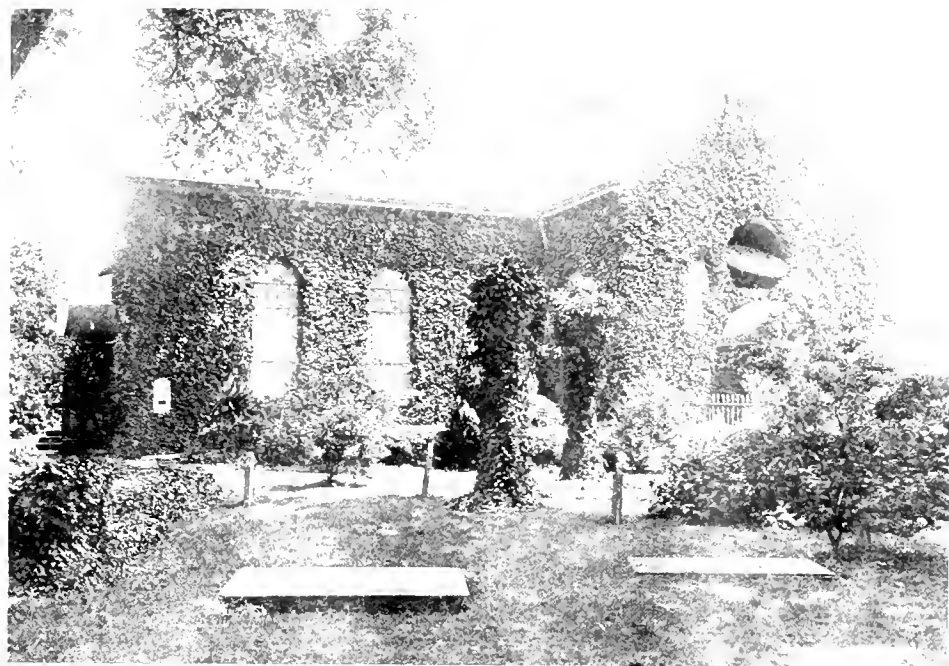
Norfolk, Virginia.





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St. Paul's Episcopal Church,

==== Norfolk, Virginia, U. S. A. ====

ONE OF THE OLDEST AND MOST HISTORIC
CHURCHES IN THE OLD DOMINION STATE

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BY
WINIFRED SACKVILLE-STONER

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1875
1876

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by
Winifred Suckville Stoner

Affectionately Dedicated
to
Mrs. Lucy Dillard Tabb-Okeson,
Beloved Wife
of
the late Reverend Doctor Nicholas Okeson,
who was loved and revered by
all who knew him.

A LEAF OF IVY FROM
THE OLD CHURCH WALL.

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Y far the most interesting spot in all the City of Norfolk, Va., and its vicinity is St. Paul's Episcopal Church and the picturesque burying ground surrounding it. All strangers who come to Norfolk make it a point to visit this church and to wander through the graveyard and read on its ancient monuments the many quaint and curious epitaphs to those who lived when the "American Eagle" had never attempted conquests of foreign lands, having trouble enough to watch over its young brood at home.

The church now standing was built in 1739, but this structure only replaced a more antiquated one, of which there is no authentic record as to the exact date of its construction, though it is supposed to have been built in 1686. There is some historical data to the effect that Lord Francis Howard gave one hundred acres of land in that year as a glebe to support the minister and church, and, there-

fore, it is reasonable to presume that St. Paul's (formerly known as the Borough Church) was erected at that date, particularly as mention is made in 1700 of Samuel Boush presenting a chalice to said church.

Fifty-three years later Colonel S. Boush gave to this parish enough bricks, imported from England, to build a new church and the old bricks were utilized in the construction of a schoolhouse.

Looking at this picturesque ivy-crowned church, with the sparrows chirping in their many nests under its eaves, or dipping their wings in the cool waters of the ever playing fountain in the peaceful graveyard, one can scarcely realize the necessity for such an order as was given to all male members of this congregation in 1741, when every man was compelled to go heavily armed while attending services, under penalty of paying five shillings fine.

This was during the troublesome times when England was at

war with Spain, and little more than a quarter of a century passed before the colonists rebelled against their mother country and the same church served as a sanctuary for women and children, who sought refuge here while Lord Dunmore's fleet was storming Norfolk.

After the colonists had gained a glorious victory at Great Bridge the British troops retreated to Norfolk and were quartered on their vessels lying in the harbor. These boats were greatly crowded and the King's troops, besides suffering from an epidemic of smallpox, had few provisions and were prohibited from replenishing their almost empty larder by the ever-watchful Americans, whose sharpshooters were constantly on the qui vive to dispatch any Red Coat who might show himself on deck.

The English commander, Lord Dunmore, having become exasperated by these desperate conditions, ordered his fleet to bombard the town on New Year's Day, 1776. The firing began at three

in the afternoon and kept up until two on the following morning, and to further complete the destruction of the town, a number of British sailors went ashore and set fire to the warehouses along the wharves, while many Virginians burned their own homes rather than to have them occupied by the enemy. Consequently Norfolk, which at that time had a population of 6,000 and was one of the fairest cities in all the colonies, was reduced to a heap of ashes.

Although Lord Dunmore had repeatedly threatened to destroy Norfolk, the bombardment proved a great surprise and horror to the majority of the citizens, since only a few timid persons had given heed to the warning by removing their families and household goods to places of safety.

It being New Year's Day, many of the colonists were trying to forget the deprivations and sorrows of war while spending the holiday in true colonial style, calling on their neighbors and drinking their healths in great goblets of foaming egg-nog.

A number of gay young revolutionists were enjoying a game of billiards in a saloon when the first shot fired from "The Liverpool" came crashing into the room where they were at play. After that the shots came fast and furious and the terror-stricken people fled for safety to the old Borough Church. There the women and children crowded together within its sheltering walls and shivered with fear as they heard the deep booming of the cannon, the shrieks of terror in the streets and the crash of falling houses, while the windows of the church were lighted by the lurid flames from many burning buildings.

As they huddled together like so many frightened sheep, a cannon ball struck the corner of the eastern gable of the church, imbedding itself in the wall, but doing no further damage. Afterwards this ball fell to the ground, where it lay neglected for many years, but was finally restored to its old position and is now an object of curiosity to all strangers.

In the early part of the nineteenth century when England and America were at peace a war of words broke out among the different members of the Borough Church and as a result of this controversy two vestries and two ministers were elected, one rector conducting the morning services and the other the evening.

In 1800 Christ Church was built and the old church deserted by the Episcopalians and loaned first to the white Baptist congregation and afterwards to the colored. Thirty-two years later the church was repaired by the children of the former "controversionists" and solemnly consecrated as St. Paul's Episcopal Church on May 18th, 1832. This church was built in the form of a cross, but some years ago a tower was erected which destroyed the symmetry of the original building. Subsequently this was removed, a handsome robing room taking its place, and in 1900 a new tower was built at the opposite end of the church.

Among the objects of interest to be seen in this old historic structure is the chair in which John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress sat when the Declaration of Independence was declared. This chair was purchased by General Bayley (a Virginian member of Congress) when the furniture of Independence Hall was sold, and afterwards presented by him to St. Paul's Church.

At the time of the bombardment of Norfolk, the valuable communion plate of this sacred edifice was carried to Scotland, but "The Okeson Parish Aid Society" has been successful in procuring a similar service of equal intrinsic value.

The collection plates are made of olive wood from the Holy Land, and presented by Baroness Zallikaffer, formerly Miss Ludlow of Norfolk.

The two beautiful memorial windows (made in England) are in loving remembrance of Rev. Dr. Jackson, who gave up his life

while attending the sufferers in the yellow fever scourge in 1853, and Rev. Dr. Nicholas Okeson, who, for over a quarter of a century was the beloved rector of this parish and through whose aid the once neglected burial ground was made into a scene of beauty.

For years this burial plot was neglected and cattle allowed to graze upon the graves, but Rev. Dr. Okeson, after having traveled abroad for some time, returned to his parish and gave a series of lectures descriptive of his travels in order to raise funds for the renovation of these grounds.

This graveyard has been in use for over two hundred years, and it is claimed that a number of the graves contain tier upon tier of coffins, but there are few gravestones to mark the resting places of the dead, for many were destroyed at the time of the Revolutionary War, and others being made of sandstone (which is very perishable) succumbed to the action of the elements. Besides, few people

could afford tombstones in colonial days, as they were very expensive, having to be brought from England, and, further, it was customary for wealthy persons of good families to have private vaults on their own grounds.

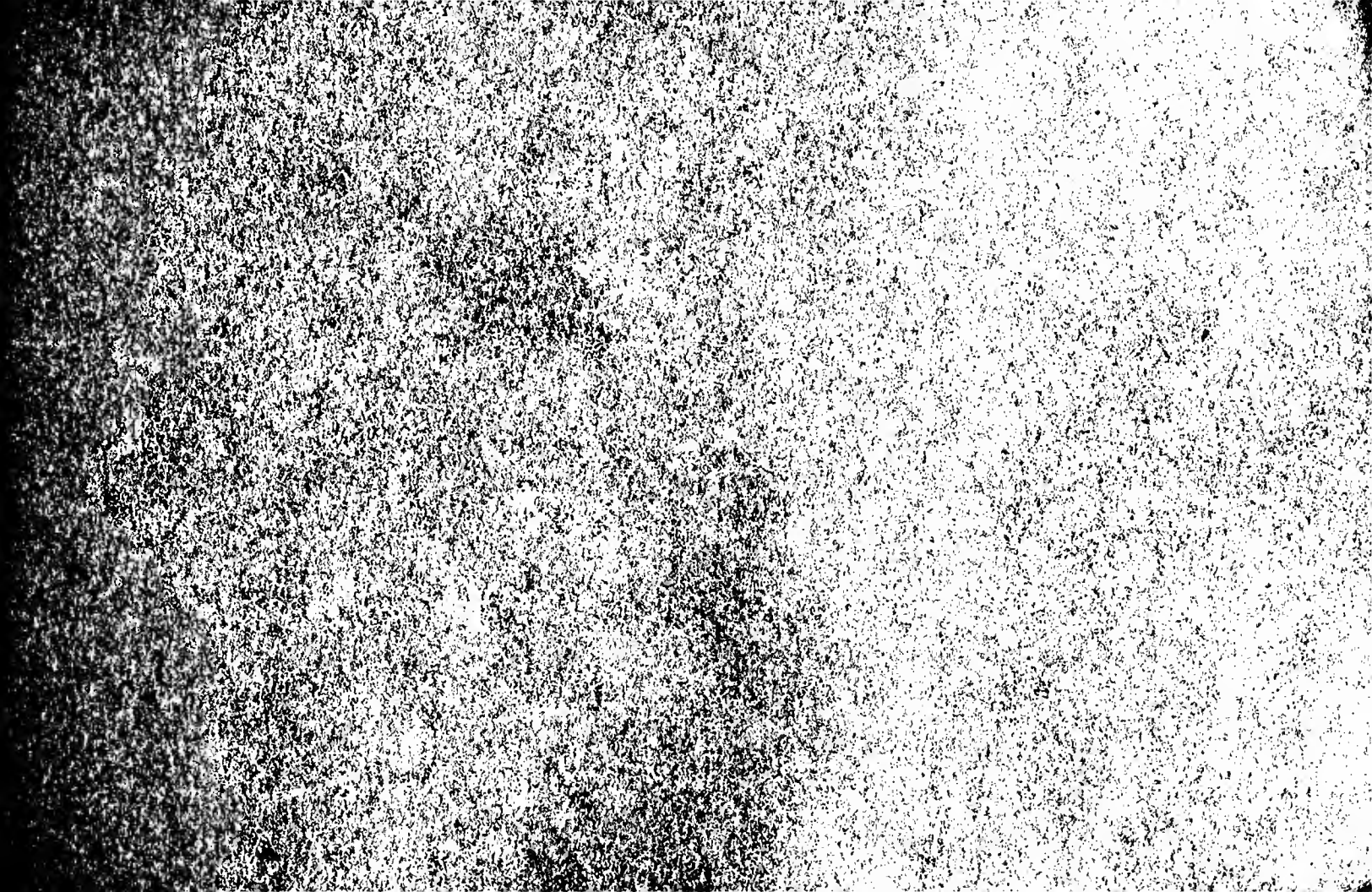
Therefore, there are but two stones which date back to the seventeenth century. These were discovered in an old churchyard on the James River, and placed as tablets on the walls of St. Paul's Church.

In addition to the historical interest connected with the grounds around this quaint old church, the visitor is also impressed with its beauty. It is surrounded by an ivy grown brick wall, and in Summer contains many flowering shrubs and ever green magnolia trees, whose large white waxen blossoms fill the air with sweet perfume.

The ground is covered with a carpet of bright yellow buttercups, and a fountain plays in the center, about which the little birds

flit to and fro and make love to each other in their sweet language of song. In the winter the waters of this fountain are often frozen into countless crystal forms which show all the colors of the rainbow as they glisten in the sunlight.

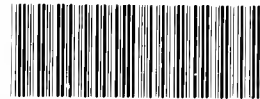
But to the true student of history perhaps the most interesting object within these historical grounds is the trunk of what was once a grand old weeping-willow tree. As a sapling this willow was brought from the grave of Napoleon on St. Helena and planted beneath the end of the church where the cannon ball rests. Here it grew into a magnificent tree and stood for many years until 1892 when its glorious leaf crown was broken off in a fierce storm. But Mother Nature has kindly concealed its rent and torn sides with a soft rich robe of dark green ivy and thus its trunk now stands as a monument of past strength and glory even as the name of the great conqueror, whose grave it once adorned.



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